

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 01430 221218Z

62

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1430

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH, PGOV

SUBJECT: THAI ELECTIONS: LOCAL COLOR

SUMMARY: IN THE SWIRLING CONFUSION OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL CAMPAIGN THAI POLITICIANS OFTEN SEEM TO OPERATE IN A STRANGE WORLD OF THEIR OWN, AND MANY OF THE PECULIAR CHARACTERISTICS OF THAI POLITICS ARE A RESULT OF THIS. A RECENT CONVERSATION BETWEEN AN EMBASSY OFFICER AND TWO POLITICIANS, ONE A FORMER MP AND DEPUTY SPOKESMAN FOR THE PRIME MINISTER, CHUSAK THARAKHAM, AND THE OTHER, RECENTLY RETIRED MAJOR GENERAL CHAKCHAI SUPANGKHAEN, ILLUSTRATES THIS WELL. END SUMMARY.

1. THE TWO MEN ANNOUNCED THAT THEY HAD JUST FORMED THAILAND'S FIFTIETH POLITICAL PARTY. CHUSAK SAID THAT HIS FORMER PARTY, THE THAI NATIONAL REGENERATION PARTY, WOULD REMAIN ON THE BOOKS, BUT ALL ITS MEMBERS WOULD JOIN THE NEW PARTY AND IT WOULD FIELD NO CANDIDATES IN THE ELECTION. (THERE ARE APPARENTLY SEVERAL SUCH DEFUNCT PARTIES AMONG THE MORE THAN FIFTY CURRENTLY REGISTERED.) THE NAME OF THE NEW PARTY IS THE THAI SOCIALIST PARTY. ACCORDING TO GENERAL CHAKCHAI IT IS REALLY A NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY, BUT THEY COULD NOT CALL IT THAT BECAUSE "IT SOUNDS TOO MUCH LIKE THE NAZIS." HE SAID THAT THE PARTY WOULD BE RIGHT-WING, BUT ADDED IT WOULD ADVOCATE A POLICY OF INSTITUTING SWEDISH STYLE SOCIALISM, WITH A SOCIALIST

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PAGE 02 BANGKO 01430 221218Z

ECONOMY AND A MONARCHY. THE PARTY ALSO FAVORS A CONTINUED

U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND. THE GENERAL EXPLAINED THAT THAILAND SHOULD USE THE U.S. AS A WATCHMAN, SO THAT IT CAN GO ABOUT ITS BUSINESS WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT ITS ENEMIES, "JUST LIKE JAPAN." THE GENERAL WENT ON TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT THAILAND HAD LITTLE TO WORRY ABOUT FROM ENEMIES. HE SAID THAT THE VIETNAMESE WOULD NEVER ATTACK THAILAND BECAUSE THEY ARE THE SAME RACE AS THE THAI AND "SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE." HE ADDED THAT THE VIETNAMESE ARE ALSO AFRAID THAT IF THEY ATTACK THAILAND, THE CHINESE WILL MOVE IN FROM BEHIND AND CONQUER THEM.

2. EMBOFF ASKED THE GENERAL WHAT HE MEANT BY THE WORD "SOCIALISM," AND THE GENERAL ASKED EMBOFF TO DEFINE THE WORD HIMSELF. EMBOFF DEFINED IT AS A SYSTEM IN WHICH LAND, RESOURCES AND INDUSTRY WERE OWNED BY THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE FOR THE COMMON GOOD. THE GENERAL BECAME AGITATED AND SAID, "THAT SOUNDS LIKE COMMUNISM\*" EMBOFF EXPLAINED THAT THERE WAS NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOCIALIST AND COMMUNIST ECONOMIC SYSTEMS, BUT THE POLITICAL SYSTEMS INVOLVED, VARIED QUITE A BIT. COMMUNISTS ADVOCATE A ONE PARTY DICTATORSHIP, AND EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS GENERALLY ADVOCATE A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM WHICH ESTABLISHES SOCIALISM GRADUALLY. AT THIS POINT THE GENERAL SAID THAT EUROPEAN SOCIALISM IS TOO SLOW, THAT THAILAND NEEDS SOCIALISM NOW. CHUSAK AGREED WITH THIS, AND ADDED THAT IF THAILAND "WAITED UNTIL TOMORROW, IT WOULD NEVER HAVE SOCIALISM."

3. GENERAL CHAKCHAI SAID THAT ONE OF THE PROBLEMS WITH THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR WAS THAT POLITICIANS TELL THE MILITARY WHAT TO DO. HE SAID THAT THE MILITARY SHOULD ALWAYS LEAD THE POLITICIANS IN MATTERS THAT THEY KNOW BEST. ASKED WHAT THE CHANCES WERE FOR A COUP IN THAILAND, THE GENERAL SAID THAT THE THAI MILITARY WOULD NEVER TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. IF THEY DID TRY, HE SAID IT WOULD BE VERY BLOODY, AND "100,000 PEOPLE WOULD BE KILLED."

4. FORMER MP CHUSAK SPOKE AT LENGTH ABOUT HIS BOSS, KHUKRIT PRAMOT. HE SAID THAT KHUKRIT IS A DICTATOR AND UNDEMOCRATIC BECAUSE HE NEVER LISTENS TO HIS CABINET BUT

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 01430 221218Z

JUST DOES WHAT HE WANTS TO DO. LATER ON IN THE CONVERSATION, BOTH MEN STATED THAT THE GREAT WEAKNESS WITH DEMOCRACY IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT ALWAYS HAS TO LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE, AND AS A RESULT NO WORK CAN BE DONE OR PROBLEMS SOLVED. BOTH MEN THOUGHT IT IS RIDICULOUS THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE U.S. MUST CONSULT WITH CONGRESS OVER MONEY SPENT ON MILITARY AID TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

5. CHUSAK, WHO RUNS AN ADVERTISING BUSINESS, SAID THAT THE THAI SOCIALIST PARTY WOULD WIN SEVENTY SEATS IN THE ELECTION BY USING MODERN ADVERTISING TECHNIQUES TO SELL THE PARTY'S CANDIDATES. HE SAID THAT A WELL ADVERTISED, INFERIOR PRODUCT WOULD OUTSELL A POORLY ADVERTISED, SUPERIOR PRODUCT, AND HE WOULD RUN THE CAMPAIGN WITH THIS PRINCIPLE IN MIND. HE POINTED AT THE GENERAL AND CLAIMED THAT HE WOULD SELL HIM TO THE PEOPLE LIKE ANY OTHER PRODUCT. CANDIDATES DIDN'T NEED TO TALK ABOUT POLICIES; ALL THEY NEEDED WAS GOOD ADVERTISING.

6. COMMENT: CONVERSATION WAS HARDLY PROFOUND, BUT WE REPORT IT AS REFLECTING SOME OF THE CHATTER WE HEAR AT THIS STAGE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. MANY OF THE OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES ARE AT A SIMILAR LEVEL OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION.  
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